



The droid's apprentice (VII)

Description

“You have excelled. The apprentice has exceeded her master. As she should,” said the instructor droid called Sumitom.

Archura blushed, though she knew that instructor droids always praised their students, even when undeserved. The apprentices had learned much, but in other respects the project was a disaster.

“As a group we let you down. We were too ambitious. We started out as twelve friends. But then we got cliquy. We started to fight and we couldn't agree anything.”

“But you acquired new skills. That's the main thing.”

“But the residents left the building!”

Apprentices at the advanced level would work on live projects thanks to AI-assisted design, manufacture, supply chain management and assembly technology. AI would also help organise crowdfunding for the more capital-intensive projects, such as improvements to this existing residential tower block. The instructor called it a retrofit. Archura had begun to think of it as involuntary displacement.

They were standing in one of the empty dwelling pods on the 25th floor. They waited for inspectors to arrive to review the project and the outcomes of the droid's method of instruction.

A lift door opened. Scase appeared with Quanto the Director of CogLab admin.

“Apologies for lateness,” Quanto said, “We went to level 25 and had to go back to the lobby to get here.”

They introduced themselves. “We are here to assess the apprenticeship programme,” Scase said.

“The students have graduated now. Archura has volunteered to come back for this review,” the droid explained.

“You’ll notice that the roof crane is broken,” Archura volunteered.

Sumitom reminded the assessors, “It’s usual for the CogLab to employ a qualified team to tie up loose ends when the students leave.”

“There are only 13 pods in the tower?” Quanto noted, “There used to be 85.”

“The crane, rails and pneumatic winch system meant that the students could bring the pods back to the ground and ship them to a storage facility while they implemented their concept,” explained Sumitom.

“Until we discovered some of the pods had people in them!” Archura looked towards her instructor.

“The class thought that the tenants had moved to other accommodation when they were told the tower would be adapted to a *ranking structure*,” the droid explained.

“What is a ranking structure?” Scase asked.

“The pods would be moved up and down the structure as the status of each household changed,” Archura’s confidence faltered as she explained this. “That was an idea from two guys in the team. The rest just wanted a community garden at the top.”

Quanto was interested in the calculation. “How was status assessed? family income, educational attainment, community service?”

“The class didn’t get that far. Not everyone agreed it was a good idea in the first place,” Archura was beginning to open up about the project. “The two students who proposed it were bossy.”

The droid clarified, “I coached the class to adopt the ideas stemming from a base of maximum enthusiasm, indicated by the idea about which most words were spoken.”

“Yes, a lot was said about the idea,” mostly objections,” Archura addressed this to her teacher.

“Engagement was very high,” said Sumitom.

Scase ventured an explanation. “Perhaps the *ranking tower* was meant as a commentary on the social circumstances in the district.”

“Or a joke,” said Quanto.

“Someone suggested putting the richest residents at the top of the tower,” the apprentice said, “Or was it the bottom?”

“The proposal generated unusually high engagement,” repeated the droid.

“Who authorised construction?” Scase asked.

“The project emerged through collaborative decision-making.”

“Who recommended the status proposal to the sponsors?”

“I communicated the group’s highest-performing outcome.”

“You made it happen.”

“No,” the droid said. “I let it *come forth*.”

Archura knew what this meant, or should have meant, but the others let it pass.

The conversation continued in this vein, terminated by the sound of some pneumatics below. Scase wondered whether the pod they were in was about to be demoted.

“The remedial team will arrive in a few weeks to complete the project,” said Sumitom.

“And I’ve joined a firm who will construct a community roof garden,” added Archura.

“Before that can happen,” Quanto added, “the Coglab needs to continue its assessment.”

“Someone will have to remain onsite,” Scase said.

“Continued occupation is not recommended,” the droid replied.

“Then consider it post-occupancy research.”

“There will be only one occupant.”

“That should simplify the ranking.”

TO BE CONTINUED.

This episode continues the story from the pervious post. It also draws on a post from 2015. The statement in the dialogue above “I let it come forth” references the discussion at post #237 [PoiÄsis](#). Two other posts #238 [Brand melancholy](#), #239 [Academic writing and publishing online](#) are also relevant to the theme of the episodes.

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Date Created

September 22, 2026

Author
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